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Editor's Report:

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SANTO DOMINGO

Does the above startle you?

That is because you are used to a free press—and perhaps don't count it as one of your blessings—but it is denied to most of the people of the world.

Even in our own hemisphere there are several nations where the press is not free at all, others where it is half-free, and still more where its freedom is threatened.

Suppression of the people's right to know the facts is a tool of tyranny so widely used in Latin America that it was the principal topic at the meeting of the Inter American Press Association which I attended here this week.

It was the first time the hemisphere's editors had assembled in the Dominican Republic, because there was no free press here at all during the 30-year absolute dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, who was assassinated in 1961.

Now after a series of upheavals which included coup and counter-coup—some half-dozen quickie regimes, including overthrow of elected President Juan Bosch for inability to screen Communists out of his government—the Dominican Republic is governed by a three-man civilian "caretaker" junta. The triumvirate has promised elections for 1965, but the job of restoring democracy is made tougher by daily propaganda broadcasts from Communist Cuba.

It is not made easier, either, by the residue of mobsters and jobholders left by the Trujillo family after its survivors fled with nearly a billion dollars of loot.

These elements never had it so good as under the vicious Trujillo regime, and the same can be said of the riffraff who live off dictators anywhere. Look at the continued menace to Argentina from the mob of "Descamisados" (shirtless ones) who followed the Fascist Dictator Peron.



W. R. HEARST JR.

Your Right to Know

Nor has the regime here been helped by U. S. timidity in delaying recognition. That was based on the erroneous old line by which Washington withheld recognition as punishment for governments seizing power without benefit of ballot.

The new policy of "U. S. interests first," credited to Assistant Secretary of State Tom Mann, has already helped here, for aid is beginning to trickle in. This civilian junta is definitely friendly to the U. S.

Another threat is from the university here, where some 20 per cent of students and teachers are a Communist hard core and practice terror against the others.

It is a situation like the one my old friend Gen. Carlos Romulo found when he left his United Nations ambassadorship to head the University of Manila. Rommie called in all concerned, said he wouldn't permit terror and anyone who violated the peaceful studies of the university could get right out. It worked.

Nothing in the Latin American tradition has helped the people of our neighbor countries to understand the responsibility of ruling themselves democratically. It makes them susceptible to demagogues and dictators.

The triumvirate in the Dominican Republic now are Dr. Donald Reid Cabral, Dr. Ramon Tapia Espinal, and engineer Manuel Tavares Espallat. They are nice, bright young men all in their late thirties, of good education and goodwill. They welcomed the editors here, attended meetings and saw us off as we left.

But I am not sure they will be able to make a go of ruling this country, where too many people want only a strongman to tell them what to do.

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The IAPA's press freedom committee reported Cuba is the "darkest example" in the hemisphere of destruction of the people's right to know.

Other countries where freedom of the press is blacked out were listed as Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay and Bolivia. And while pointing out that the press is still free in Chile, the IAPA is worried about the effects of a new law there.

In giant Brazil, too, there is a serious threat. The left-leaning government is squeezing the press to the wall by blocking purchase abroad of the paper they print on. This is diagnosed as a slick trick to force a government monopoly of newsprint—and that means print what the government wishes or don't publish at all.

Even the Organization of American States—which is supposed to guard the hemisphere but generally prefers to snooze while letting the U.S. worry about it—is moving into the anti-free-press act.

Continued



MANUEL TAVARE ESPAILLAT
In the Dominican Republic's Triumvirate

UPI Photo

An OAS agency, called the Inter American Commission on Human Rights, last year drafted a "convention on freedom of expression" which is expected to come up for ratification at the next session of the hemisphere's Foreign Ministers.

This is a real sleeper and my hat is off to the IAPA's keen-eyed watchdogs for detecting a gimmick which—in the name of freedom—poses a threat to freedom. After a long list of articles piously calling for every type of free expression, there is one article which opens the door for gagging the press wherever a government aims to do so.

It says in part: "The exercise of the rights and freedoms . . . implies duties and responsibilities and may therefore be subject only to such formalities, conditions and restrictions, clearly defined by law and applied in conformity therewith, as are strictly necessary in a democratic society to uphold national security, territorial integrity, public order or the prevention of crime, to prevent incitement to racial or religious strife, to protect the health, morals, reputation or rights of others, to prevent the disclosure of confidential information, or to guarantee the impartial administration of justice."

Play that one back. It takes quite a while merely to determine whether it means anything at all. Then, translated from the gobbledegook, it dawns that practically every freedom of the people's right to know is exposed to destruction—with the sanction of legality—if any government decides it needs to gag its critics.

As Manuel Cisneros of Peru concisely put it to the IAPA:

"The best law for the protection of the press is no law at all."



The list of countries in the Americas where the press is gagged points up the old truth that dictators—whether of the right wing or the left—can't easily be told apart without a score card. Both kinds are on the IAPA list of blackouts. When it comes to facing up to a populace with access to the facts, their fear shows, and they crack down on the newspapers to prevent spread of information.

It isn't so hard to understand the dictators. Britain's Lord Acton summed them up: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

But the itch to gag critics goes beyond dictators. It often infects governments which think of themselves as democratic, although history proves there can be no government of, by and for the people without a free press.

In fact, since all government—benevolent or tyrannous—is basically the price the people pay in loss of freedom for security, order and the general welfare, a resentment of criticism becomes an endemic disease of all governments.



Even in our own country, the press has had to fight with unrelaxed vigilance to be free. A classic example was in the administration of Thomas Jefferson, whom we think of as a great libertarian, and whose eloquent words of the Declaration of Independence listed freedom of the press as essential along with freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

Jefferson once wrote that, if he were forced to choose between a government and no newspapers, or newspapers and no government, he would unhesitatingly select newspapers as more important.

But, in the heat of political battling, even the liberty-loving Jefferson resented criticism to the point of forgetting his high principles and attempting to gag critics.

As my friend John R. Reitemeyer, the current president of the IAPA, proudly pointed out in Santo Domingo, it was his own Hartford (Conn.) Courant that had to fight Jefferson in one case.

Jefferson and his majority in Congress had voted a secret payment to France, which his political opponents, including the Courant, believed to be tribute to the European conqueror Napoleon.

Said the Courant: "The executive of the United States follows the cowardly example of a man who cuts off his thumbs to escape enlistment."

Jefferson had criminal libel charges brought against the Courant in 1806. By 1812 it got to the U.S. Supreme Court, which in an historic decision ruled that Federal Courts had to depend on written laws for such cases, and tossed it out.

Today, almost any editor would admit that the language used by the Courant was over-rough. But the principle remains the same.

William Randolph Hearst